



## 1803: The Preparation

WITHIN weeks of his appointment to lead the expedition, Meriwether Lewis visited the federal arsenal at Fort Monroe, Va., to select weapons and supplies. This chronology highlights some of the preparations for the expedition.

**Dec. 20** — The United States takes title to the Louisiana Purchase, opening the way for the exploration to come. Through April 1804 Clark continues training the men while Lewis spends much of his time in St. Louis, making preparations for the journey

**Dec. 7** — Soldiers and boatmen clamber ashore south of St. Louis after poling their keelboat and two pirogues up the Illinois side of the Mississippi. Soldiers begin clearing land for Camp River Dubois at the mouth of the Wood River, where the Missouri and Mississippi rivers meet.

# The Lewis and Clark Expedition



## Preparation

Lewis leads the expedition, and the arsenal at Harpers Ferry oversees the construction of the keelboat. One of the events leading

**April and May** — Lewis travels to Lancaster, Pa., to meet astronomer Andrew Ellicot and learn to plot latitude and longitude to better find his way across the unknown wilderness. His next stop is Philadelphia, where he learns rudimentary medicine and studies botany, zoology, surveying and Indian lore.

**June 19** — Lewis writes to friend William Clark, asking him to serve as co-commander. Clark accepts in a letter dated July 18.

**July 4** — Lewis receives his official orders: "To explore the Missouri River and its principal streams and to travel on to the Pacific Ocean." Announcement of the purchase of the Louisiana Territory is published in national newspapers.

**Sept. 11** — Averaging 12 miles a day moving downstream on the Ohio River, Lewis approaches Grand View, Ohio, with the first permanent members of the expedition.

**July 6-17** — Lewis returns to Harpers Ferry to pick up supplies and move them overland to Pittsburgh. There he is delayed for more than a month when he learns a contractor hired to build a 55-foot keelboat has used inferior materials and must redo much of the work.

**Oct. 14** — Clark and the "young men from Kentucky" join the group in Louisville, Ky. He continues recruiting and training men through November.

# and Clark Expedition

IN DECEMBER 1803 William Clark began recruiting and training the men who would make the journey westward. The “Corps” consisted of 51 men, including 37 soldiers, 13 civilian boatmen and interpreters, and Clark’s slave, York. Especially among the soldiers, each expedition member possessed multiple skills, including experience in leatherwork, blacksmithing, gunsmithing, carpentry and surveying.

*The original party included:*



**SGT Nathaniel Pryor** — Eventually earned a commission, led several expeditions into new territory and fought in the War of 1812 in the Battle of New Orleans.



**SGT John Ordway** — Recruited from the regular Army, he was appointed NCOIC and kept a journal in case Lewis and Clark’s records were lost.



**PVT John Colter** — After the expedition’s return, Colter went his own way, becoming a hunter and trapper and the first non-Indian to explore what later became Yellowstone National Park. He later served in the War of 1812.



**PVT Pierre Cruzatte** — Half French and half Omaha Indian, he was a professional riverboatman who also served as interpreter.



**PVT Francois Labiche** — Of French, Indian and African heritage, he was a boatman and served as interpreter for the Mandan chief who traveled to Washington after the expedition returned to St. Louis.

# *The Corps of* **Discovery Troops**



# Lewis and Clark

## *and the U.S. Army Corps of Discovery*

Story by Gil High

**T**HIS year began the official celebration of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, and May of 2004 will see a flurry of activities to commemorate the start, in 1804, of a journey that lasted more than two years and covered nearly 8,000 miles.

But the remarkable adventures of Lewis and Clark during their exploration of the Louisiana Purchase began nearly a year earlier with the recruitment of a few American soldiers and the vision of their commander in chief.

For more than 20 years Thomas Jefferson had expressed curiosity about the lands west of the Mississippi River, and even before he was inaugurated president in March 1801 he was forming plans for a government-sponsored exploration of the West.

Jefferson's opportunity to acquire the Louisiana Territory came in the form of a threat. Napoleon Bonaparte had become emperor of France in 1800 and held title to Louisiana. Jefferson didn't want a French army at his western border and knew that loss of access to the port of New Orleans would be disastrous to the U.S. economy.

For his part, Napoleon had his own troubles in the New World when the people of Haiti successfully revolted against French rule. At the same time, France was again at war with Great Britain. Knowing Napoleon's situation, Jefferson instructed his minister to France to offer to buy a tract of land on the lower Mississippi River or at least negotiate a treaty guaranteeing free navigation of the river.

At first Bonaparte refused every proposal, but in a surprise move in April 1803 he offered to sell the entire Louisiana territory.

The purchase, amounting to 3 cents an acre, extended America's western border to the Rocky Mountains and added 828,000 square miles, doubling the nation's size.

Even though finalization of the purchase would take months, Jefferson immediately asked his private secretary, CPT Meriwether Lewis, to start logistical planning for an expedition to explore the new lands and to assemble a "Corps of Discovery." Lewis quickly agreed and soon after wrote his former commander, LT William Clark, requesting that he act as co-leader of the expedition.

The two friends — and the small group of soldiers and civilian guides, interpreters and boatmen they assembled — were tasked to open the West to trade, explore the navigable rivers, map the territory, and study the land and its natural resources along the way.

## *Beginning the Journey*

